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STATEMENT BY THE PRESIDENT OF THE SECURITY COUNCIL

At the 3859th meeting of the Security Council, held on 6 March 1998, in connection with the Council's consideration of the item entitled "The situation in Croatia", the President of the Security Council made the following statement on behalf of the Council:

"The Security Council expresses its concern at the Croatian Government's lack of compliance with obligations assumed under the Basic Agreement on the Region of Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium (S/1995/951), the Croatian Government's letter of 13 January 1997 (S/1997/27, annex) and the agreement of 23 April 1997 between the United Nations Transitional Administration for Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium (UNTAES), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and the Croatian Government concerning the return of refugees and displaced persons. The Council notes that the overall security situation in the Danube region remains relatively stable, but is particularly concerned about increasing incidence of harassment and intimidation of the local Serb community in the region and the failure of the Croatian Government to apply the process of national reconciliation in an effective way at the local level. This worrying situation, together with recent statements by the Croatian authorities, cast doubt upon the Republic of Croatia's commitment to include ethnic Serbs and persons from other minorities as full and equal members of Croatian society.

"The Security Council, recalling the statement by its President of 13 February 1998 (S/PRST/1998/3) and having noted the letter from the Permanent Representative of the Republic of Croatia of 5 March 1998 (S/1998/197), calls upon the Croatian Government publicly to reaffirm and by its actions to demonstrate its commitment to fulfilling its obligations under the Basic Agreement and other agreements in full, including through progress on national reconciliation at every level. In particular, the Council calls upon the Croatian Government to take prompt and unequivocal steps to ensure the safety, security and rights of all Croatian citizens and to build confidence among the Serb community throughout Croatia, including by providing promised funding for the Joint Council of Municipalities. These steps should include measures to create the

conditions to allow local Serbs to remain in the region, to facilitate the return of refugees and displaced persons and to address underlying practical and economic issues which inhibit returns. The Council calls upon the Croatian Government to: establish clear procedures for the documentation of refugees from Croatia; issue an equitable plan for nationwide two-way returns; implement fully and fairly its legislation on amnesty; act promptly to pass equitable property and tenancy rights legislation which would encourage returns and stimulate additional international reconstruction assistance; ensure fair employment benefit practices and equal economic opportunity; and ensure the non-discriminatory application of the rule of law.

"The Security Council recognizes that, since the end of the UNTAES mandate, the performance of the Croatian police has been generally satisfactory, and in this context expresses its appreciation and support for the work of the United Nations civilian police support group. The Council notes, however, that public confidence in the police is low. The Council calls upon the Croatian Government to take measures, including through public information and police preventive action, to improve public confidence in the police as part of a wider programme of measures to prevent ethnically motivated crime and ensure the protection and equal treatment of all Croatian citizens, regardless of ethnicity.

"The Security Council stresses that, following the termination of UNTAES, responsibility for the full reintegration of the Danube region lies clearly with the Croatian Government. The United Nations will continue to work closely with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in monitoring the situation and reminding the Croatian Government of its obligations."